



IMMACULATE HEART^{OF}MARY CATHOLIC CHURCH

A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR NOVEMBER 6, 2022

Dear friends in the Lord,

After nearly eight years at IHM, I'm sure I've shared with you countless times the basic outline of my vocation to the priesthood: a growing fascination with the priesthood during high school; a season of "testing" the vocation during college; years of formation at seminary leading to ordination at age 27.

But that "Cliff Notes" version of my discernment leaves out the countless friends and loved ones whose insight and encouragement over the years helped me finally respond to God's call with confidence and enthusiasm: My second grade Sunday school catechist, who suggested that my budding devotion to Christ's presence in Holy Communion might be the sign of a vocation. (I confess I don't remember this, but my parents always swore that it was true!) My high school youth minister who said something of the same thing about my emerging love for the Mass and for the Church as the People of God. Some dear high school friends, who, although not Catholic, always came to Christmas midnight Mass, and who asked me early one Christmas morning if I'd ever considered becoming a priest. A German nun, retired from nursing, who led the grounds crew at St. Mary's Hospital in Athens, who approached me during my summer job there to tell me that she thought I "had the eyes of a priest." My own parents (my father a Catholic and my mother an Episcopalian) who, when I confided to them as I was leaving for college that I thought I might have a vocation, told me that they, too, thought I might, and that nothing would make them happier.

These memories flood over me now, because during the next week, we at IHM will be conducting the *Called By Name* vocations program to coincide with Vocation Awareness Week in the wider Church. *Called By Name* asks you, the community, to consider who in your midst has personal gifts or attributes that might be a sign of a vocation as a priest, a religious sister or brother, or a deacon.

Please think about those people in your family and among our parishioners and submit their names so that Father Robbie and I might encourage them to begin praying—or perhaps continue praying—about a possible church vocation. It is God who does the calling; but God asks all the members of his Son's Body, the Church, to help those he calls hear, accept and respond to their vocation.

Your brother in Christ's word and work,